

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 04077 081632Z
ACTION NODS-00

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 4077

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY

ALSO PASS WHITE HOUSE

DEPT PLEASE REPEAT TO AMMAN, CAIRO, DAMASCUS AND JIDDA

E.O. 11652: XGDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS US
SUBJECT: THE U.S. AND ISRAEL--SOME GNAWING CONCERNS

1. I ARRIVED IN ISRAEL THREE WEEKS AGO TODAY, THE DAY AFTER THE ELECTIONS, ANTICIPATING PLENTY OF PROBLEMS. BUT AS THE BEGIN ERA UNEXPECTEDLY BEGINS, IT SUDDENLY IS OBVIOUS THAT THE RAPIDS AHEAD COULD LEAD TO NIAGARA. WE HAVE REPORTED AT PERHAPS UNDUE LENGTH ELSEWHERE ON THE DEEPLY TROUBLED STATE OF ISRAEL AND OF US/ISRAELI RELATIONS (TEL AVIV 4048). BUT I WANT TO HIGHLIGHT A FEW PERSONAL WORRIES AND HUNCHES:

2. COMMUNICATIONS FAILURES. SOMEHOW I SENSE THERE MAY HAVE BEEN A SHORT CIRCUIT THESE PAST MONTHS. SOMEHOW THERE MAY HAVE ARISEN IN WASHINGTON AN ILLUSION THAT AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE ON THE WEST BANK AND GAZA IS ONE POSSIBLE OPTION. IF THAT ILLUSION DOES EXIST, I WANT TO TRY TO DISPEL IT. IN MY JUDGMENT, THAT OF ALL

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MY STAFF, AND THAT OF ALL MY DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES HERE, IT IS NO OPTION WHATSOEVER. ON THIS ISSUE, OVER 90 PERCENT OF THE ISRAELI ELECTORATE AGREES, AND RABIN/ALLON/PERES ARE AS ADAMANT AS BEGIN/DAYAN/WEIZMAN, TO SAY NOTHING OF GOLDA. TO BELIEVE THAT SOMEHOW ANY ISRAELI GOVERNMENT CAN BE BROUGHT TO ACCEPT SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD ONLY BE TO COMPLETELY MISUNDERSTAND THE ISRAELI CHARACTER AND

PEOPLE. WE SHOULD NOT BASE ANY U.S. POLICY ON SUCH A FALLACY.

3. "BEGIN THE HAWK." THERE ARE SOME REAL HAWKS IN THE LIKUD; MEN WHO SEE WAR AS INEVITABLE ANYWAY AND COULD LOOK FOR SOME ARAB PRETEXT TO LAUNCH A DEVASTATING PREEMPTION. BUT THEY ARE IN THE MINORITY, AND MANY OTHERS STILL MOURN THE FEARFUL COST HERE OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR. (HAD THE U.S. SUFFERED A SIMILAR PROPORTION OF CASUALTIES, WE WOULD HAVE LOST OVER 160,000 DEAD AND OVER 400,000 WOUNDED.) THOUGH I HAVE TALKED LONGER WITH BEGIN THAN ALMOST ANY OTHER DIPLOMAT HERE, I ADMIT I DO NOT YET KNOW HIM WELL. BUT PARTLY FROM SOME ISRAELIS WHO DO, I SEE HIM PARADOXICALLY NOW TO BE A MAN OF PEACE--NOT WAR. AT LEAST HE IS NOT ITCHING FOR A FIGHT; RATHER HE IS ITCHING TO NEGOTIATE--PREFERABLY WITH ARABS DIRECTLY. AND HE MIGHT DO MORE THAN WE NOW SUSPECT IN ORDER TO GET THE CHANCE.

4. THE CALENDAR TRAP. THIS IS A NEW POLITICAL ERA HERE. ALL THE FAMILIAR ASSUMPTIONS HAVE CRUMBLED. MEN ARE COMING TO POWER AFTER POLITICAL LIFETIMES OF OPPOSITION AND THEREFORE WITHOUT THE DISCIPLINE AND RESPONSIBILITY WHICH POWER BRINGS. IT WILL BE SOME TIME BEFORE WE KNOW HOW THAT MAY CHANGE THEM. AND THE ARABS WILL HAVE TO DO SOME RECALCULATION ABOUT THEIR OWN PRIORITIES AS THEY ASSESS THE NEW ISRAELI LEADERSHIP. ALL THIS ARGUES FOR FLEXIBLE NEGOTIATING CALENDARS; NO APOCALYPTIC TIMETABLES; AND PERHPAS FOR RUNNING SOME RISKS WITH ARAB IMPATIENCE
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TO MINIMIZE THE GREATER RISKS FROM ISRAELI INEXPERIENCE IN GOVERNING.

5. THIS DOES NOT MEAN ABANDONING EFFORTS TO GET TO GENEVA THIS YEAR. BUT IT DOES MEAN STARTING NOW TO THINK OF OTHER WAYS TO KEEP A NEGOTIATING OPTION BEFORE THE PARTIES, SHOULD GENEVA PROVE IMPOSSIBLE. WE MUST CONTINUE TO MANAGE THE ARAB-ISRAELI IMPASSE SOMEHOW THIS YEAR SO AS TO PRECLUDE ANOTHER WAR, EVEN IF A TRUE SETTLEMENT REMAINS ONLY A RECEDING MIRAGE.

6. IT ALSO RAISES A QUESTION ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE BEGIN/CARTER MEETING. THAT MEETING WILL CAST A LONG SHADOW OVER THE DIFFICULT NEGOTIATING ROAD AHEAD. IF IT TAKES PLACE IMMEDIATELY, BEGIN WILL NOT HAVE YET ABSORBED MANY OF THE LESSPALATABLE EFFECTS OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF POWER. WE SHOULD CONSIDER CAREFULLY WHETHER A PREPARATORY VISIT BY HIS FOREIGN MINISTER, UNDOUBTEDLY DAYAN, MIGHT NOT IMPROVE THE CHANCES THAT BEGIN'S OWN

TRIP WILL ADVANCE RATHER THAN RETARD THE GENEVA PROSPECTS.
LEWIS

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NNN

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